The Possibility of Discrimination Based on Migration Background in Hiring for

Person-Organisation Fit

Patrik Viitala

SNR 2075081

Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences, Tilburg University

MA Management of Cultural Diversity

Supervisor: dr. Hans Siebers

Second Reader: dr. Camilla Spadavecchia

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Abstract

This thesis examines whether hiring for person-organisation (P-O) fit produces discrimination against job applicants with a migration background, and if so, how. The research was conducted at a Dutch private limited company that had established a step in their interview process that was designed to assess job applicants' P-O fit. Internal documents were inspected to find out the way the interview was organised and what the formal criteria for P-O fit were, and seven applicants and six evaluators were interviewed about their experiences and perspectives about the P-O fit interviews and the perceived criteria for P-O fit at the organisation. The findings suggest that hiring for P-O fit at the organisation does not seem to produce discrimination against job applicants with a migration background, but might have a disparate impact against applicants with personality traits or soft skills dissimilar to those of the evaluators or the rest of the existing workforce. Due to the non-work related aspects of some of the P-O fit criteria, the organisation is recommended to develop the interview step further to mitigate the risk of bias. One way to do this would be indicating a specific set of soft skills for each position based on the job description, and focusing on evaluating those rather than the values or personality traits of the applicant. In addition, the structure and questions of the P-O fit interview should be standardised for all applicants so differential treatment could not occur, and a bias mitigation training could be put in place for evaluators and selectors to increase awareness.

Keywords: person-organisation fit, migration background, discrimination, bias, hiring

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Introduction and Problem Statement

A sizable body of research has looked at how hiring managers interpret signs of quality in job applicants' educational backgrounds, prior employment experiences, and social ties (Hatch & Dyer, 2004; Fernandez et al., 2000). However, a smaller but growing body of work has concentrated on the significance of cultural matching (Bourdieu, 2008; Rivera, 2012). This viewpoint presupposes that an applicant's pre-hire organisational culture fit, typically known as person-organisation (P-O) fit (Potter & Cooper, 2020), will be predictive of cultural characteristics that are independent of human or social capital but crucial to individual or group productivity, or human and social capital traits that are difficult to observe but linked to work success (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Kristof, 1996; Chatman et al., 1998). Organisations are progressively making hiring decisions based on the applicants' projected person-organisation fit, and they do this by evaluating the extent to which applicants seem to share the same culture and values as existing employees (Stein, 2018).

There is literature arguing for the importance of hiring for P-O fit and its possible correlation with work performance (Turáková et al., 2017), but there is no consensus on whether it is a practice that is strictly work-related and truly fair to all job applicants (Siebers, n.d.). Assessing P-O fit is closely tied to the evaluation of personal attributes as soft skills, which has been argued to be difficult and possibly problematic because they are "fuzzy" and hard to operationalise (Moss & Tilly, 1996; Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2011). There is some literature on how recruitment decision-makers' biases can result in favouring applicants with similar characteristics as them (Cable & Edwards, 2004). However, research focusing solely on job interviews designed to assess P-O fit, and whether these alone can produce discrimination based on background or origin, is missing.

This study examines the interview stage specifically designed to assess P-O fit in the hiring process of organisation X, a private limited company based in the Netherlands. This is done by reviewing the design and purpose of these P-O fit interviews, interviewing the job applicants and evaluators on their experiences of the interviews, and dissecting the evaluators' perceptions of P-O fit at organisation X and feedback about the applicants. The

goal is to identify whether this stage of the hiring process of organisation X is equal to applicants from all backgrounds and whether the evaluators have biases about applicants with a migration background that affect these applicants' hiring chances in a disproportionately negative way.

What makes this research new and relevant is the Dutch context, and the focus on interviews specifically designed to assess the P-O fit of job applicants. What is also new to this research is that the P-O fit interviews at organisation X are conducted by existing members of the workforce who are not recruiters or hiring managers. Discriminatory practices in the hiring process, in general, have been studied, but not as much from the perspective of P-O fit and how that is perceived by employees who participate in hiring processes, especially in the context of the Netherlands. Additionally, not much attention has been paid to the possible negative effects on underrepresented groups of job applicants that hiring for P-O fit can cause, and relatively little research has been done on if P-O fit interviews work out in a disproportionately negative way for job applicants with a migration background. This thesis contributes to that research.

The academic aim of the research is to contribute to the existing literature about discrimination in hiring, by finding out whether interviewing for P-O fit produces discrimination in hiring against applicants with a migration background. The societal aim is to find solutions to shape the hiring process in a way that is hopefully less discriminatory towards job-seekers of different backgrounds and origins. Thus, the following research question and sub-questions were formulated:

- Does hiring for person-organisation (P-O) fit at organisation X produce discrimination in hiring against job applicants with a migration background, and if so, how?
    - What kind of procedures apply to establish P-O fit at organisation X, and is this process the same for every applicant?
    - What are the formal criteria for P-O fit at organisation X?
    - What are the P-O fit criteria in practice at organisation X?
        - Do the criteria in practice differ from the formal criteria?

○ Are the formal P-O fit criteria or the criteria in practice work-related or not?

○ Are there biases that become operational in the P-O fit interviews?

▪ If identified, where do the possible biases come from?

▪ How do the possible biases influence the evaluators' hiring decisions?

○ Does hiring for P-O fit at organisation X lead to unequal hiring chances for applicants with a migration background?

▪ If yes, is this because of differential treatment or disparate impact discrimination?

Theoretical Framework

An overview of the ideas and models previously presented on organisational culture, person-organisation fit, bias, soft skills, and migration background is provided in this chapter. The concept of organisational culture is introduced at the beginning of the chapter, and then the closely related idea of person-organisation fit is examined. What follows is an investigation into bias, stereotypes and prejudice, with the final two sections focusing on how soft skills are conceptualised, how the relevance of abilities to the workplace can be determined, and what is meant by migration background in the context of the Netherlands.

Organisational Culture

Corporate culture is claimed to be an integral part of a company because having shared values within the workforce supports the smooth operation of the company's business and therefore contributes to the company's better economic performance (Turáková et al., 2017). Thus it is argued that hiring for organisational culture fit should be part of the hiring process alongside other criteria (Bouton, 2015; Turáková et al., 2017). However, in comparison to work-focused assessment criteria such as the evaluation of knowledge, skills and abilities workers need to carry out their work properly, the work-relatedness of hiring for organisational culture fit is unconfirmed. Assessing the organisational culture fit of a job applicant entails the evaluation of their personal attributes, i.e. their personality traits and motivation. Siebers (n.d.) identified six unresolved issues why

such ratings can be problematic from a work-related perspective: employers' ability to assess applicants' personality and motivation in hiring procedures; the predictive value of personality assessments for applicants' job performance; the influence of personality traits on job performance; the predictive value of applicants' motivation for their job performance; the influence of person-organisation (P-O) fit on job performance; the possibility of rating the quantity and quality of work and required behaviour in performance assessments when focusing on personal attributes.

Hiring for organisational culture fit can also be discriminatory against candidates with a migration background, for example, if their personal attributes are systematically rated in less favourable terms in comparison to candidates with a non-migration background (Siebers, n.d.). These biased perceptions can severely impact the career chances of migrants because candidates who are perceived as having a low cultural fit are about six times less likely to be hired than candidates perceived to have a high cultural fit (Bye et al., 2014). According to Wolgast et al. (2018), candidate ethnicity also affects the questions they are asked in job interviews. In their study, ethnic outgroup candidates prompted recruiters to focus more on the cultural norms and values of the candidates and how they fit the ingroup norms of the organisation. In addition, they found that the interview questions prepared for outgroup candidates were rated as less useful for hiring decisions and that summaries emphasizing person-job fit were perceived as more useful instead of person-culture or person-group fit. Candidates from the ethnic ingroup received more questions related to the match between the candidates' abilities and the demands of the jobs.

Person-Organisation Fit

The concept of person-organisation (P-O) fit is defined as "the compatibility between people and organisations that occurs when at least one entity provides what the other needs or they share similar fundamental characteristics, or both" (Kristof, 1996, pp. 4-5). In the P-O fit component of its hiring process, organisation X focuses on finding those similar characteristics between the job applicant and the employees of the organisation. This kind of

P-O fit can be described as supplementary P-O fit, which is defined as "the extent to which applicants are perceived as similar to existing organizational members and as sharing the organization's values" (Horverak et al., 2013, p. 48). This implies that the ideal job applicant possesses characteristics similar to those already widely possessed in the existing workforce (Cable & Edwards, 2004). According to Kristof (1996), the characteristics that have to be in alignment are the culture, values, goals and norms of the organisation, and the values, goals, personality, and attitudes of the applicant. Byrne (1972) introduced a similar idea in his similarity-attraction paradigm, which suggests that interviewers are more attracted to similar individuals and therefore assess similar applicants as more qualified for the job and a better match for the organisation than dissimilar applicants.

Another form of P-O fit is complementary P-O fit (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987), which means that the job applicant is perceived to have different, but still valuable and desirable, characteristics in comparison to the current workforce (Piasentin & Chapman, 2007). A manager could, for example, perceive that a certain type of personality is needed for their team to be more efficient or effective. An organisation looking to hire for complementary P-O fit, therefore, looks for traits in applicants that could complement those of the existing workforce and organisational culture (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). Complementary fit can also be called demand-supply fit, since it occurs when the demands or needs of the organisation meet with the supplies or abilities of the applicant, and vice versa (Kristof, 1996). Employers expect contributions from their staff members in the form of their time, effort, dedication, knowledge, skills, and abilities, and they provide them with the financial, physical, psychological, task-related, interpersonal, and growth opportunities they need (Kristof, 1996).

The work-relatedness of P-O fit is contested. Although job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and turnover intentions show relatively robust and generalisable relationships with P-O fit, it has only weak, ungeneralisable correlations with overall job performance (Arthur et al., 2006). According to Arthur et al. (2006), the fit-performance relationship, which is already somewhat shaky, becomes more convoluted when work attitudes are taken into

account. In addition, using P-O fit to make selection decisions may lead firms to (unintentionally) choose employees based on future employee wellbeing (such as satisfaction) rather than work performance. Even though many firms may view employee wellbeing as an important and desirable goal, it seems to be a somewhat shaky ground on which to base hiring decisions (Arthur et al., 2006). In the United States, for example, the use of P-O fit is incompatible with existing legal and professional norms and practice of certifying employment examinations against individual-level standards (Civil Rights Act of 1991; Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1978). When it comes to the verification of employment tests and systems, the Civil Rights Act of 1991 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1978, Section 14, B.3) attest to the use of criteria that "represent important or critical work behavior(s) or work outcomes". These include "work performance" and other criteria, such as "production rate, error rate, tardiness, absenteeism, and length of service" and "performance in training" (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1978, Section 14, B.3). However, work attitudes such as job satisfaction or organisational commitment are not recognised as proper criteria for test validation in employment decision-making (Arthur et al., 2006).

Furthermore, the use of supplementary P-O fit in hiring procedures is a form of post-bureaucratic labour control, because it is an instrument to evaluate job applicants' personality traits as "soft skills", which are "fuzzy" (Moss & Tilly, 1996) and hard to operationalise in specific terms (Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2011). Work-unrelated hiring procedures that depend on the arbitrary discretion of the interviewers can lead to disparate impact discrimination, meaning that these kinds of procedures may resolve in a disproportionately negative way for people with a migration background (Pager & Shepherd, 2008). For example, Almeida, Waxin and Paradies (2018) found that a low level of understanding of recruitment decision-makers about non-western culture and business had a negative impact on their perception of the P-O fit of applicants with a non-western background. Likewise, Horverak et. al (2013) found that an immigrant job applicant who expressed private life preferences different from the majority culture was evaluated as

having the lowest supplementary P-O fit compared to other applicants who were perceived to be more integrated. Disparate impact discrimination is distinguished from differential treatment discrimination, which occurs when individuals are treated differently based on their demographic characteristics such as ethnic or racial markers (Pager & Shepherd, 2008).

Bias, Stereotype and Prejudice

Bias can be defined as "any systematic factor that affects a judgment other than the truth" (West & Kenny, 2011, p. 360). Distinct bias variables that exert distinct influences on judgments have been highlighted by various fields of psychology. For instance, in the work of Murray et al. (2002) on the projection of personal values in romantic relationships, perceivers' assessments of their partners' values are influenced by both their own personal values and the truth (i.e., the partner's actual values). Another example from cognitive psychology is the perseveration bias, which refers to the tendency for people to hold onto old opinions while failing to update them with new information (West & Kenny, 2011). The bias to perceive members of the ingroup more favorably than they actually are and members of the outgroup less favorably than they actually are is a third example that arises from the study of intergroup relations (West & Kenny, 2011). Biases can improve the accuracy of some of our decisions, but they can also make us susceptible to foreseeable fallacies and problems of judgment. Unconscious beliefs and attitudes regarding, for example, ethnicity, gender, or other factors can affect the judgment of experts, leading to biased decisions (Neal et al., 2022). Examples of biases include stereotyping and prejudice.

Stereotype has been defined as "a belief about a group of individuals" (Kanahara, 2006, p. 311), and a belief about someone who belongs to the stereotyped group is referred to by Kanahara (2006, p. 314) as "an application of stereotype". For instance, when we think that all Finnish people love to go to the sauna, we have a belief about a group of individuals. A stereotype is a widely held, oversimplified idea or image about a particular group or an individual member of one that is often based on assumptions or limited information, rather than accurate or complete knowledge. Stereotypes can be positive, negative, or neutral, but

they tend to be oversimplified, rigid, and resistant to change (Allport, 1979). Also, the group subjected to a stereotype can be not just an ethnic group but also a socioeconomic group, an academic group, a family, a religious group, a sports team, a gender, patients with the same condition, people with a similar physical appearance, and so on (Kanahara, 2006).

Prejudice was defined by Allport (1979) as a favourable or unfavourable feeling toward a person or a thing that comes prior or is not based on actual experience. It refers to a preconceived opinion or attitude about a group or individual, usually based on limited information or stereotypes, rather than actual evidence (Allport, 1979). Negative stereotypes and prejudices can lead to discrimination, which refers to the act of treating individuals or groups of people unfairly or prejudicially due to their ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or other categories to which they belong or are perceived to belong (American Psychology Association, 2022). A person may act on their prejudice and discriminate against others in an effort to feel more powerful and to improve their own self-esteem. This gives them a false feeling of identity and self-worth. Additionally, stereotyping and categorisation can provide a scapegoat for individual or collective issues (Allport, 1979). As mentioned earlier, discrimination can be direct in the form of differential treatment, or indirect in the form of disparate impact.

Bias in Hiring and Ways to Mitigate it

Several factors make hiring particularly susceptible to bias, which can appear during several stages of the hiring process, including candidate outreach, the evaluation of applications, the interview, and the last stages of selection (Consul et al., 2021). The first factor is the scant information used to make employment decisions (Altonji & Pierret, 2001). Typically, hiring involves evaluating individuals who are virtually unknown. Their resumes, applications, and work samples usually give a brief overview of their qualifications, and it is up to the reader to determine whether or not those qualifications are applicable to the jobs for which they are applying (Bendick & Nunes, 2012). Job interviews are also frequently quick; for entry-level positions, they can last as little as 10 minutes (Bendick et al., 2010). Additionally, "impression management", the deliberate presentation of oneself to produce

impressions that are not sustained after hire, frequently applies to interviews (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 2013; Higgins & Judge, 2004). These and other factors make it difficult for traditional job interviews to accurately predict post-hiring work success (Le et al., 2007).

The time constraints under which managers frequently work also have a harmful influence on stigmatised groups (Bendick & Nunes, 2012). Stereotypes have a stronger impact when there is a deadline involved (MacRae et al., 1998). Additionally, the lack of connection between job candidates and those making the hiring decisions infuses every conversation with a tremendous amount of pressure to perform, which tends to increase the threat of stereotypes (Bendick & Nunes, 2012).

Differences in opportunities to fix mistakes are another factor increasing bias in hiring (Bendick & Nunes, 2012). When candidates are rejected, they frequently look for work elsewhere right away, giving businesses no time to change their minds.

Additionally, bias in hiring decisions is unlikely to be eliminated by external pressure from anti-discrimination laws (Bendick & Nunes, 2012). Job seekers who believe discrimination has taken place frequently lack the facts necessary to assess it. As a result, they are more likely to look for alternative employment than to challenge the decision. Due to these factors, just 6% of formally submitted discrimination complaints to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in the United States concern recruiting practices (Bendick et al., 1994).

To identify and mitigate bias in the hiring and interview process, Chamberlain (2016) suggests five strategies: examining the subtle biases and beliefs that prevent interviewers from seeing candidates' potential; recognising ideas, interpretations, and beliefs that lead to misconceptions about people; examining verbal and nonverbal cues that send implicit signals originating from or reflecting bias; realising the peril of comparisons using biased criteria; and creating a checklist that enables interviewers to recognise bias in their thoughts and actions. Chamberlain (2016) also gives examples of thoughts and phrases that might reflect limiting assumptions about the applicant. Statements such as "I really like him/her" and "She/He will fit in" may be produced by bias, if they are based on opinion and

preferences instead of facts and data. Thinking that an applicant is articulate may be based on the assumption that they are an exception to one's belief about a particular group, and thinking that someone's accent is difficult to understand leads to an unintentional decision to stop listening and to discount the applicant's worth (Chamberlain, 2016).

To add onto Chamberlain's (2016) five strategies, Erkmen et al. (2021) propose ten measures for bias mitigation in hiring from the perspective of cardiothoracic fellowship recruitment. These include committing to diversity, training evaluators and selectors in bias mitigation, considering a blinded step in the evaluation of applicants, considering standardised letters of reference, conducting structured interviews for applicants, standardising evaluations, preventing one opinion from dominating an applicant's overall evaluation, speaking up and speaking out, consulting a diversity and inclusion officer or representative, and collecting data. Consul et al. (2021) also mention targeting diversity during applicant outreach, approaching applications with a holistic view, and utilising structured and behavioural questions during the interview.

Soft Skills

Skills are often categorised under hard skills, the technical prerequisites for a job, and soft skills, the social and interpersonal aspects of one's abilities (Deepa & Seth, 2013). Soft skills are defined as those that are related to personality, attitude, and behaviour rather than formal or technical knowledge (Moss & Tilly, 1996). Hurrell et al. (2012) also describe them as non-technical and not dependent on abstract reasoning, involving interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities to facilitate mastered performance in specific contexts, and Davis and Muir (2004) define them as attitudes and behaviours displayed in interpersonal interactions that influence the outcomes of those encounters. The three definitions all describe soft skills as being non-technical, interpersonal, and influencing their setting.

Soft skills are a product of post-bureaucratic organisational developments of the 1970s (Shan, 2013). Prior to this change, during the Industrial Revolution, employees were evaluated on their input (human capital) and output (quantity and quality of work), and

measured by their hard, technical abilities. In a post-bureaucratic society, soft skills take precedence over hard skills, and employees are evaluated not only on their input and output but also on how the work is performed and which personality traits the employee has (Siebers, 2018; Urciuoli, 2008). However, this does not imply that such expectations were not present before or during the Industrial Revolution. Employers simply did not evaluate them and did not view them as skills, but rather as attitudes, traits, or tendencies (Grugulis et al., 2004).

Selecting employees based on soft skills that are not work-related can lead to disparate impact discrimination. The same skills are used to evaluate applicants, but this favours individuals from one group. Soft skills, however, are not always non-work-related. It can be useful to evaluate prospective employees on their soft skills for certain positions where interpersonal communication is crucial, such as cashiers, bartenders, waiters, or front desk clerks (Zamudio & Lichter, 2008). To see if discriminating risks exist, it is helpful to examine the work-relatedness of a skill. It is also crucial to remember that hard skills are not excluded from non-work-related skills. It is equally non-work-related to ask an assembly line worker to have a degree in information technology as it is to expect a sense of humour from them. The work-relatedness of soft skills, however, is less obvious. Work-related skills can be distinguished from non-work-related skills by three factors: work-related skills are measurable according to universal criteria (Grugulis & Vincent, 2009; Moss & Tilly, 1996; Urciuoli, 2008), they have predictive value for the applicant's performance (Moss & Tilly, 1996; Searle & Al-Sharif, 2018), and they depend on how an individual interacts with their surroundings (Hurrell et al., 2012; Moss & Tilly, 1996; Ortiz & Roscigno, 2009).

Migration Background

In the context of the Netherlands, a person with a migration background is defined as someone who was born abroad or has at least one parent who was born abroad. People in the Netherlands who have been born abroad are defined as first-generation migrants, while people born in the Netherlands and having at least one migrant parent are considered

second-generation migrants (Statistics Netherlands, 2022b). A person with a non-migration background is someone whose both parents were born in the Netherlands (Statistics Netherlands, 2022a).

Methodology

The chapter outlines the research methods used to achieve the objectives of the study. This covers the approach to research design, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, research quality indicators are provided to indicate the internal validity, external validity, and reliability of the study.

Research Design

The research was qualitative in nature and utilised document analysis and semi-structured interviews in its data collection and analysis. Document analysis was chosen as a method because the formal criteria of P-O fit and how the P-O fit interviews were to be organised were laid out in internal documents at organisation X. It is also a low-cost, non-intrusive, and non-reactive method of gathering empirical data (Bowen, 2009). However, to reduce prejudice and establish credibility, documentary evidence is frequently coupled with information from interviews and observations (Bowen, 2009). Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they are the preferred option for gathering data when the goal of the research is to learn more about the respondents' personal experiences and unique viewpoints rather than acquiring a general grasp of a phenomenon (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Another advantage of the semi-structured interview is the ability to maintain focus while allowing the latitude to explore relevant concepts that may arise during the interview (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

Data Collection

The research followed a mixed-method approach formed in a two-step process. First, all documents related to the P-O fit component of the hiring process of organisation X were collected via desk research. Second, semi-structured interviews with applicants and

evaluators were then separately conducted. Both parties were interviewed before a hiring

decision was made, and they were asked to verbally reconstruct the events of the P-O fit

interviews they had with each other to see if their descriptions fit together and whether they

followed the structure designed for these interviews at the organisation. In addition,

evaluators were asked questions about their perceptions of P-O fit at organisation X to find

out if the perceptions differed from the formal criteria laid down in the documents. Therefore,

two different interview guides were created; one for applicants (Appendix A), and one for

evaluators (Appendix B).

The interview guides were based on the research question, sub-questions, and

theoretical framework, and focused on aspects of the P-O fit interview that each of the two

parties uniquely experienced. Both interview guides began with reminders to the researcher

to ask for the respondent's permission to record, to introduce themselves and the research,

to remind the respondent of the researcher's positionality, the respondent's anonymity, and

their right to withdraw from the research at any time, and to ask for the respondent's

informed consent to proceed. Both groups of respondents were also asked to provide

background information, which included the respondent's age, gender, and (non-)migration

background. Afterwards, the questions were divided into three themes and differed slightly

between the two groups.

The three themes of questions in the interview guides were: reconstruction of the

event, evaluation of the situation, and person-organisation fit at the organisation. Under the

first theme, both groups of respondents were asked if they had prepared anything for the

P-O fit interviews, what kind of questions they were asked, and to describe the sequence of

events during the P-O fit interviews. Evaluators were additionally asked whether they

followed the template of questions provided by the organisation. Under the second theme,

the respondents were asked how they felt about the P-O fit interview, whether they felt

comfortable or not, what kind of impression did they get of the opposing party, did they like

them, and so on. Applicants were then asked whether they felt like the evaluators liked them,

whether they felt like they reached a good mutual understanding with the evaluators, if they

expected that this mutual understanding or lack thereof would have any consequences for the hiring decision, if they thought the interview questions were work-related or not, whether the P-O fit interview increased or decreased their chances of being hired, and whether their background became salient during the interview or not. Evaluators were asked whether they felt like they "clicked" with the applicant or not and if this click or lack thereof would have consequences for the hiring decision, what kind of associations came to the evaluator's mind when they thought of the applicant and whether those associations were related to the job or the applicant's background, why they chose to ask the questions they asked in the P-O fit interview and whether they thought their questions were work-related or not, whether the P-O fit interview increased or decreased the applicant's chances of being hired, and whether they became aware of the applicant's background during the interview. In the end, applicants were asked to describe the profile of an ideal P-O fit they thought that the evaluators were looking for and if that profile has any connection to their backgrounds, and evaluators were asked to describe the culture of organisation X and what they thought was an ideal P-O fit for the organisation.

The sampling strategy made use of a mix of purposive and quota sampling. Only applicants who made it through the earlier stages of the hiring process to the P-O fit interviews were interviewed, and only evaluators who participated in the P-O fit interviews were interviewed. Evaluators were existing employees of the organisation who conducted P-O fit interviews as part of the organisation's hiring process but did not necessarily have a background or position in recruitment. In terms of control variables, both applicants and evaluators were divided into three categories: individuals with a migration background, individuals with a non-migration background, and individuals who did not (yet) live in the Netherlands. This is because the organisation employed and hired individuals not only in the Netherlands but abroad as well. In addition, the sample was controlled by age (30-year-olds and under, and 31-year-olds and over) and gender (female, and male). The age and gender control variables were chosen to see if they affected the informants' perspectives. The two age groups were divided on the basis of the average age of the employees of organisation

X, which was 31 years. Because the average age of the company is relatively young, this might affect the hiring chances of older applicants. Gender might also matter in terms of the types of questions asked in the interviews depending on if biases come to play. The ideal sample, therefore, consisted of 12 applicants and 12 evaluators, meaning that 24 interviews were to be conducted in total. However, the sample of applicants was prioritised over the sample of evaluators due to its higher importance. The sample of applicants led the research, meaning that only evaluators who had conducted the P-O fit interviews with the applicants already interviewed for the research, were interviewed. To ensure the ethicality of the research, participants were informed of the aim of the research, what was expected of them, how their confidentiality was to be protected, and given the possibility to not take part in or withdraw from the research at any time.

The interviews took place between late March and early June 2023 and took into account all P-O fit interviews that took place during this time period. In the end, 13 out of 24 interviews were successfully conducted. Out of the 13 interviewees, seven were applicants and six were evaluators. The distribution of respondents per control variable is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Final Sample per Control Variable

Variable	Female	Male	30 or under	31 or over	Migrant	Non-migrant	Non-resident
Applicants	5	2	3	4	4	1	2
Evaluators	4	2	3	3	5	1	0

The sample deviates from the ideal because there were challenges in finding respondents among applicants. The P-O fit interview is the fourth stage in the hiring process of organisation X, so only a couple of applicants per vacancy make it through to that stage, and some did not respond to my invitation to be interviewed. The number of vacancies the organisation had open, also affected the research. When the number of vacancies was high,

the opportunities to interview applicants were also more numerous. Towards the end of the research, however, vacancies were gradually filled, leaving less room for research. In addition, because the sample of applicants led the research, this led to the sample of evaluators lagging behind as well. The reason for there being one less evaluator compared to the sample of applicants is that one of the invited evaluators did not respond to the invitation to be interviewed.

Each interview was scheduled in advance at a designated time and lasted for about 25 to 45 minutes. Most of them were conducted via video calls on Microsoft Teams due to the interviewees residing in various locations around the Netherlands and the world. Two of the evaluators were interviewed face-to-face at the headquarters of organisation X. The interviews went fairly well and responses were quite straightforward. However, some respondents did not at first understand what I meant by, for example, "click", mutual understanding, or associations, so those terms and questions had to be explained further in order to receive proper responses.

Data Analysis

In the beginning, the collected documents and written information related to P-O fit at organisation X were analysed to understand how the P-O fit interviews were designed, what constituted a P-O fit at organisation X, and whether those qualities were work-related or not. It was also crucial to understand the formal criteria of P-O fit at organisation X and how the interviews were supposed to be organised to see if the process was the same for every applicant and if the criteria were work-related or not. The documentation detailing the process and criteria was reviewed and searched for keywords and phrases which were compared to the literature in the field of hiring discrimination and P-O fit.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded. Transcribing the interviews allowed for easier access to what was said during the interviews and helped in drawing comparisons between different answers and parts of the interviews. The purpose of coding was to highlight the similarities and differences between the interviews. The coding method

used was selective coding because the codes were based on the topics established in the interview guides. The coding scheme is presented in Appendix C.

In the end, both applicants' and evaluators' experiences of the P-O fit interviews, the evaluators' perceptions of P-O fit at organisation X, and their views on applicants with and without a migration background, and applicants who were not yet residents of the Netherlands, were compared to identify possible bias.

Research Quality Indicators

Internal and External Validity

To ensure the internal validity of the results, the methods used are based on qualitative research guidelines common in academic studies. The research triangulates multiple sources of data since the dataset consists of documentation and interviews with different informants from both sides of the table in terms of recruitment. Two interview guides were prepared, and each interview followed the same structure, with the first interview serving as a pilot to test the interview guide in action. The sampling strategy, purposive sampling, has a clear set of criteria, and the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed with a universal coding method. The same methods were applied throughout the whole research period.

For external validity, the research process is described in detail to ensure that the research on this particular topic can be replicated and tested by other researchers in other environments. However, implications for wider society can be challenging to establish due to the subjective and context-specific nature of the data, so the results might not be representative of organisations in general.

Reliability

In terms of reliability, I am aware of the possible influence my own role in the organisation might have had on my informants' statements since I double as the researcher as well as an employee of the organisation. To mitigate the possible influence of my identity, it had to be emphasised to both groups of interviewees that when it came to this study, I was

researching strictly as a student of Tilburg University, and not as an employee of organisation X. I took extra care to not confuse these two roles, and asked my informants to be very elaborate in their answers and treat me as a researcher rather than a colleague or an evaluator. I tried not to take anything for granted and told my informants not to take my identity into account when they gave me their statements. In addition, I continue to ensure the anonymity of the respondents and made it clear to them that their responses will not be shared with anyone, and that they would not affect the hiring decisions of the applicants interviewed. I also did my best to reduce my involvement in the hiring process of the applicants I interviewed for the research. When analysing the data, I based my analysis on universal methods and derived my conclusions based on the theoretical framework, and not my own possible biases as a recruiter.

Findings

The research took place in a medium-sized private limited company based in the Netherlands. In its offices around the world, the company, at the time of writing, employed about 200 people from about 40 different nationalities, making the organisation highly diverse and international. The main stakeholders of the research included me as the researcher, the company's recruitment manager, the human resources manager, employees who participated in the organisation's hiring process by conducting P-O fit interviews with job applicants, and the applicants themselves. The field of research was these P-O fit interviews and the way they were organised, to see if they treated applicants from all backgrounds equally, if the evaluators had biases that came into play in interaction with applicants and in the decision-making process, and if these possible biases had a discriminatory impact on applicants with a migration background.

The findings of the study are presented in the order of the sub-questions of the research. First, the procedures that apply to establish P-O fit at organisation X are explained, and then both the formal criteria for P-O fit and P-O fit criteria in practice are discussed. Afterwards, the work-relatedness of the P-O fit criteria and interview questions is examined,

and in the end, the risk of bias in the P-O fit interviews and hiring chances of applicants with a migration background are explored. The procedures and formal P-O criteria were found in internal sites and documents of the organisation, but the rest of the topics were described by the applicants and evaluators who participated in the study.

Procedures that Apply to Establish P-O Fit at Organisation X

The organisation describes its process and philosophy regarding the P-O fit interviews on two internal sites that aim to inform the organisation's employees of the overall recruitment process and help them prepare for interviews with job applicants, as well as in one internal document whose purpose is to describe what the P-O fit interviews are about and what kind of questions the evaluators could ask from the applicants.

Based on the sites, the organisation's hiring philosophy is based on the "Who method", which has been developed by Geoff Smart, the chairman & founder of ghSMART (*Dr. Geoff Smart - #1 Thought Leader On the #1 Topic In Business*, 2023), and Randy Street, the vice chairman of ghSMART, a leadership advisory, education, and analytics firm whose mission is stated to use its expertise in human behaviour to help CEOs, boards, and investors build valuable companies (*Randy Street, Co-author - Dr. Geoff Smart*, 2023). The Who method is described in their co-authored book "Who: The A Method for Hiring", which was published in 2008 (MAA1, 2021). According to organisation X, Smart and Street established the method so that organisations could steer further away from biased hiring and closer to creating a comprehensive image of the candidate's competencies and basing hiring decisions on that instead of just likeability (organisation X, 2023c). The goal of the method is to create a team of "A players" for a company (organisation X, 2023c), and the authors promise "a simple 4-step method for hiring the right people with a 90% success rate" (ghSMART, 2017).

Inspired by the WHO method, the interview process of organisation X comprises of five stages; a screening interview conducted by a recruiter, an in-depth follow-up interview with the hiring manager, an assignment, the P-O fit interview, and a reference check

(organisation X, 2023c). Alongside the whole process, recruiters and hiring managers are also advised to use a scorecard that is created for each vacancy and which includes the mission, required competencies and desired outcomes for the position (organisation X, 2023c). With this process, the organisation wants to ensure a great candidate experience, a short turnaround time, and hire the right person for each role (organisation X, 2023b).

The P-O fit interview, which is the fourth stage, is described to take about 30 to 45 minutes and is usually held immediately after or together with the assignment stage (organisation X, 2023c). The organisation describes it as an opportunity for the hiring team to assess if an applicant is aligned with the organisation's values and matches the department and team (organisation X, 2023c). They also see it as an opportunity for the applicant to learn more about the organisation and assess whether they would enjoy being an employee there (organisation X, 2023c). For conducting the interview, the guidelines advise involving two to three employees who the applicant would work with should they be hired, and who have not yet participated in the interview process (organisation X, 2023c). In the interview, the employees are meant to evaluate the applicant's fit to the company values, team fit, and soft skills (organisation X, 2023c). The employees are encouraged to come up with their own questions to make sure to find the applicant they are looking for, as well as share personal stories and experiences with the organisation to inspire the applicant (organisation X, 2023c).

The document, which is meant to support the evaluators in preparation for and during the P-O fit interview, consists of a short introduction and three chapters of instructions and example questions for evaluating the applicant's fit to the organisation's values and the team, and their soft skills (organisation X, 2023a). When assessing the applicant's fit to the organisation's values, evaluators are encouraged to be enthusiastic and pay attention to the overlap or mismatch between the applicant's personal values and the company culture (organisation X, 2023a). Example questions include asking the applicant about their own most important personal values, if the applicant understands the organisation's values and if they identify with any of them, and if the applicant could give the evaluators an example of a

situation in which they acted according to their personal values (organisation X, 2023a). When assessing the applicant's fit to the team their future role would be in, evaluators are advised to think about the characteristics of the team, what kind of team member they would most benefit from, and relevant questions to find out whether the applicant would fit the team in terms of personality and work ethic (organisation X, 2023a). Example questions include asking the applicant what kind of team member they are, what quality they think a manager should have, in what ways they would like to be managed or supported, what kind of personalities they struggle with the most, what kind of humour they like, how they handle conflicts, what they would like to learn, and what would they do if they would not have to work and could do anything (organisation X, 2023a). The third chapter of the document focuses on assessing the applicant's personality traits and soft skills of which, according to the organisation, some might be required in order to be successful depending on the position. There are a set of specific soft skills along with example questions mentioned that will be discussed further in the next section, but evaluators are also encouraged to think about which soft skills and personality traits they would find necessary for the applicant to have (organisation X, 2023a).

In short, organisation X follows a hiring philosophy and interview process inspired by the Who method, which has been developed and introduced in a book written by two American leadership, education, and analytics consultants. The interview process of organisation X has five stages, of which the P-O fit interview is the fourth and last actual interview. The P-O fit interviews are conducted by two to three employees who are part of the team where the vacancy is open, and who have not yet participated in the interview process of a specific job applicant. In the interview, the employees are supposed to assess the applicant's fit to the values of the organisation, the team, and their soft skills. The organisation has established standardised guidelines for the hiring process in hopes of providing a great candidate experience, a short turnaround time, and ensuring that they hire the right person for each position. Therefore, in theory, the process should be the same for every applicant. However, the instructions and example questions provided in the document

for P-O fit evaluators leave room for personal interpretation and contribution based on the vacancy, the team, and their own opinions.

Formal Criteria for P-O Fit at Organisation X

As mentioned above, the evaluators assess the applicants' fit to their team and the company values, and the applicants' soft skills. There are no formal criteria for the team fit since the idea of such fit seems to differ based on the team and the evaluators' personalities. The formal criteria of an applicant's fit to the company values are also not clearly stated on the internal sites or the supporting document. However, the organisation's values are publicly mentioned on the organisation's official website. They include being purpose-driven and committed to making the world a better place, having an open mind and a focus on personal growth, being ambitious, dedicated, optimistic, and proud, and believing that work goes hand in hand with having fun (organisation X, 2022).

The set of soft skills assessed is more explicit. The document meant to help evaluators during the P-O fit interviews mentions five specific soft skills, which are: adaptability/flexibility, resilience/stress tolerance, self-starter behaviour, ambition, and time management (organisation X, 2023a). In addition to these specific skills, however, evaluators are given the freedom to think of other ones they might deem necessary for the specific role or team.

P-O Fit Criteria in Practice at Organisation X

The P-O fit criteria in practice refers to the idea that the respondents had of the organisation's culture and the ideal P-O fit. Applicants were asked if they got the impression that the evaluators were looking for a specific type of person, while evaluators were asked to describe the culture of the organisation and what constituted an ideal P-O fit in their minds.

Based on the P-O fit interviews they experienced, the applicants felt that the evaluators were looking for people who are purpose-driven and enthusiastic to learn new things, love to challenge themselves and have a can-do attitude and positive approach to work. They also thought that the person the evaluators were looking for should like the

company and its mission, be collaborative and willing to help others and take part in activities with the team. According to one applicant, the organisation also seemed open for employees having "side hustles", as in other professional endeavours that bring in extra money or fulfilment beyond their regular job at the organisation. However, there was one applicant who had a contrasting feeling. This applicant felt that the evaluators in his specific P-O fit interview were looking for someone educated and serious, as in a person who has a "works in a bank kind of vibe". The applicant was male, 30 or under, and a non-resident, but the control variables do not explain the difference in perspectives.

The characteristics of organisation X's culture mentioned by the evaluators revolve around the mission and values of the organisation. A lot of the evaluators described the culture of organisation X as fun, open-minded, supportive, driven, and friendly. According to the evaluators, employees in the organisation have ambitious targets and metrics to achieve but there is not too much pressure on it. For example, one of the evaluators mentioned that they never truly have to work overtime unless they really want to. The employees are also allowed to be themselves and encouraged to improve their skills and try things out without having to be afraid of failure. Everyone is given the benefit of the doubt, and colleagues can also be seen as friends with whom one can spend time with also outside of work. One of the evaluators said:

> I think a relaxed and fun workplace would be among the first, then good, good colleagues that you can also be friends with and the no blame culture, which basically allows people to be more themselves and to be, to try more things because they are not afraid that they're going to fail (Evaluator 3, personal communication, May 3, 2023).

When it came to the ideal P-O fit, many of the evaluators struggled to put their thoughts into words in the beginning. However, they mentioned that for an applicant to be a great P-O fit for the organisation, they should be committed to the mission and identify with the values of the organisation, be dedicated and willing to put in the work to find solutions to problems, be open-minded and interested in getting to know people, attend team and

company events and prefer working in a team over working alone, have a growth mindset and be open to giving and receiving feedback. A couple of the evaluators also mentioned that the ideal applicant should be naturally relaxed, outgoing and like to have fun not only while working but also outside of work, and one mentioned that they should be honest, able to prioritise and have good communication skills. Most of the evaluators also thought that it is important to feel a sort of personal "click" or chemistry with the applicants in order to work well together. For example:

> It's about finding … people with whom you will see sharing drinks or talking during [organisation X] events or participating together because you also need to think about the fact that that person is going to be in the entire collective and uh, yeah, you need to find somebody that would fit the rest of the group (Evaluator 3, personal communication, May 3, 2023).

Another evaluator said:

> Would you be able to have a serious conversation with them? Would you be able to have a fun conversation with them? Would you be able to have a personal conversation with them? I think all of those aspects are important (Evaluator 5, personal communication, May 4, 2023).

However, some of the evaluators mentioned chemistry more as a bonus rather than a hard requirement for an applicant to be hired.

To summarise, all applicants but one felt that the evaluators were looking for collaborative, purpose-driven and enthusiastic employees who love to challenge themselves and have a can-do attitude and positive approach to work. The evaluators, on the other hand, mentioned that for an applicant to be an ideal P-O fit, they should be committed to the mission and values of the organisation, be dedicated, hardworking, open-minded and outgoing. According to the evaluators, the culture of organisation X is fun, open-minded, supportive, driven, and friendly, and they want newly hired employees to fit in. The desire for finding employees that fit in within the existing orgnisational culture implies that the organisation looks for supplementary P-O fit in applicants.

The criteria in practice do not really differ from the formal criteria. However, most of the evaluators focused on personality traits and values rather than soft skills. Apart from the expectation that the ideal employee should be interested in people and attend company events, the applicants' perspectives mirrored those of the evaluators' for the most part.

Work-Relatedness of the P-O Fit Criteria and Interview Questions

Both the formal criteria and the criteria in practice cannot be said to be strictly work-related. The qualities mentioned in the internal documents and described by both evaluators and applicants referred to values, personality traits and soft skills. Based on the literature, a match between an applicant's and the organisation's values, as well as having specific personality traits, is non-work related. Looking for specific soft skills to fit a job, however, is contested.

Forming an opinion about an individual's personality or values is highly subjective, and soft skills are hard to operationalise. Because of this, despite having formal criteria, the applicants' match to the criteria is mostly left to the arbitrary discretion of the evaluators. Although the criteria themselves do not disproportionately exclude any groups of applicants, the procedure leaves room for bias that could lead to disparate impact discrimination based on the backgrounds and personalities of the applicant and the evaluators in each P-O fit interview.

Types of Questions Asked in the P-O Fit Interviews

The types of questions asked by the evaluators varied a lot per interview, but what they all had in common was that none of them followed a specific structure. Applicant 1, who was female, 31 or over, and a migrant, said that questions came up as the conversation went on, giving an example of talking about her marriage with the evaluators. The evaluators proceeded to ask questions about how the applicant had met her spouse, how she got married, what the situation was then and how the applicant is managing her life now. The applicant then went on to talk about her hobbies, and later got asked questions such as " … in technical area, what do you want to do? What do you not want to do?" and "How are you

like in your personal life? How do you collaborate with people?" The applicant considered the P-O fit interview a general chit-chat rather than an interview. Evaluator 1, male, 30 or under, and a non-migrant, mentioned talking about the applicant's hobbies and free time, but left out the part about the applicant's marriage. Additionally, a topic regarding the applicant's free time was raised as a potential "red flag" in terms of hiring. The evaluator was cautious because the applicant had told him that she liked to obtain certifications for different areas of software development in her free time. According to the evaluator, " … an engineering certificate is fun to get but it doesn't tell you that you can actually do the job" (Evaluator 1, personal communication, April 24, 2023). The evaluator, therefore, made an assumption about the applicant's hard skills based on what she had said to do for fun in her free time.

Applicant 2, male, 30 or under, and a migrant, thought that the focus of the interview questions was for the evaluators to understand how good he is in soft skills such as socialisation, openness, and extraversion. He was asked questions such as "What do you like and dislike about your previous job?" and "What specifically made you choose [organisation X]?" Otherwise the interview was more of a conversation and the applicant could not mention any other questions he was asked. His evaluator, Evaluator 2, female, 30 or under, and a migrant, mentioned a couple more topics they had discussed. These included asking the applicant why he was looking for a new job, how he got in contact with organisation X and what was his first impression, what attracts him to the organisation and how does he see the fit between his personality and the values of the organisation.

Applicant 3, female, 31 or over, and a migrant, was asked what her expectations were from a dream job, if she is able to work in a team with differing opinions, how she would react to a conflict, and what her expectations were from the job and the organisation. Another topic she discussed with the evaluators was how she was used to working in her home country and what the differences were compared to the Dutch way of working. She had had negative experiences back home, so Evaluator 3, male, 31 or over, and a migrant, tried to comfort and assure her that things were different in the Netherlands. The evaluator's description of the interview reflected the one given by the applicant.

The P-O fit interview of Applicant 4, female, 31 or over, and a non-resident, differed from the other interviews in the sense that the questions she received were structured and focused strictly on the mission and values mentioned on the official website of the organisation. She was asked whether she knew what the organisation's mission was, what each of the values meant to her, how important personal growth was to her, and was given the opportunity to give examples of situations where she applied those values in her previous work. According to Applicant 4, there were no questions about her free time. Unfortunately Evaluator 4 did not respond to an interview invitation, so there is no data on the other perspective of this specific interview. However, based on the applicant's description, the interview seemed to focus on work-related topics.

Applicant 5, male, 30 or under, and a non-resident, had a negative experience of the P-O fit interview. According to him, he was not asked any questions, which led to him talking about topics he thought the evaluators would find interesting. He first described his background, and then started to talk about his hobbies. To his disappointment, he felt that he did not receive any meaningful input from the evaluators, which made him think that either the evaluators were uninterested in him or that he was just being boring. Despite mentioning that the applicant had "launched into … a monologue" and "rambled on" in the beginning, the evaluator's overall depiction was not as negative. Evaluator 5, female, 31 or over, and a migrant, said that they had asked the applicant questions such as "Would you not miss home? Why would you consider moving to a different country?" and "Why did you choose [organisation X]? What is important for you about [organisation X] specifically? How does it align with your goals?" The evaluator mentioned that in the end they ran out of time because the applicant's introduction had taken so long. However, she thought this might have been a mistake on the evaluators' part. They had not introduced themselves or the goal of the P-O fit interview in the beginning of the meeting, so the applicant could not have known what topics to talk or ask the evaluators about.

Applicant 6, female, 31 or over, and a migrant, said that every question in her P-O fit interview was related to the job. However, she also mentioned that the interview felt like it

was designed to get to know her as a person and how she would react in different situations. She was asked how she would handle stressful times at work, and also, if she would use a benefit the organisation offers regarding personal development. Evaluator 6, female, 31 or over, and a migrant, confirmed the question about personal development, and her reason for asking about this was that she wanted to know if the applicant had clear career plans for the future and if she had strong willingness to learn new skills. In addition to this and the question about stressful times, she also asked whether the applicant knew about the organisation's mission and values, and what kind of team atmosphere the applicant would prefer. To the evaluator's surprise, the applicant had not familiarised herself with the values. The evaluator thought that this should have been done by the applicant before the interview.

Applicant 7, female, 30 or under, and a non-migrant, had applied for an internship and she was asked about her preferred management styles and how she worked. She spoke about how she would like to be guided and what she would like to learn. According to her, she was also asked how she would deal with stressful moments, how she manages her work, and how she sees herself growing. The evaluator, Evaluator 7, female, 30 or under, and a migrant, gave a much longer answer. She confirmed the question about management styles, but gave some criticism to the question itself. According to her, it is a challenging question, and applicants tend to stay in the middle in their answers.

> … if you say, yeah, I prefer someone who's very hands on and if that person is not hands on, then that creates a bit of, yeah, a bit of a not conflict, but a bit of distance, and if you say that you prefer to be completely left alone, that is also like a thing that creates some distance (Evaluator 7, personal communication, June 9, 2023).

She also asked the applicant about how she differentiates between urgent and non-urgent tasks, if she utilises any tools to organise her work, what her conflict resolution style is, what she thinks about working with people from different cultural backgrounds, if she prefers to work in a team or individually, what she would like to learn during the internship, what she enjoys doing in her free time, and what was her spirit animal. The evaluator thought the

applicant's response was funny because the spirit animal was the same as an earlier hired intern had already claimed, and she thought that the animal fit the applicant.

Hobbies and free time were discussed in all interviews but one. Some questions revolved around the organisation, for example; how the applicant found it, what was their first impression of it, if they know the organisation's mission and values, how these align with the applicant's personal goals, what made them apply, and what the applicant expects from the job and organisation should they be hired. An applicant who still lived abroad was also asked why they would make the move and if they would not miss their home country. Other questions focused on personality and soft skills, for example; how the applicant likes to work, if they can work in a team where there are often different opinions and how they react to such situations, how they handle conflicts, and how they deal with stress. One applicant was also asked why they were changing jobs and what they liked and did not like about their previous job, and another applicant was asked what their spirit animal was.

The applicants' and evaluators' opinions on the work-relatedness of the interview questions were mixed. Only one applicant, Applicant 3, thought the questions were strictly work-related, whereas the others felt that most of the questions did not relate to the specific job they applied for, but were still important for the evaluators to find out whether the applicant would perform and fit well within the team. According to one applicant: " … that is very mandatory when you're hiring someone, I guess, because companies environment just get flourished only when there are very nice people and having a mature understanding between each other" (Applicant 1, personal communication, April 24, 2023). Most of the evaluators said that the questions were not work-related, because they thought that the P-O fit interviews are designed to get to know the applicants and vice versa, and to understand how the applicants would fit not only into the role but into "the broader scheme of things". Only two evaluators, Evaluators 6 and 7, said that the questions were work-related, but these evaluators focused more on soft skills they thought would be beneficial for the position, and not so much on the personal lives of the applicant and themselves.

Risk of Bias in the P-O Fit Interviews

To indicate whether the P-O fit interviews were susceptible to bias, the applicants and evaluators were asked questions about whether they had prepared for the interview, what their first and general impressions of each other were, and whether the applicants' backgrounds became salient during the interviews. In addition, evaluators were asked whether any associations had come to their minds when first meeting or just thinking about the applicants, and applicants were asked whether they thought their backgrounds had any connection to the P-O fit they perceived the evaluators to be looking for.

Out of the seven applicants, four prepared for the interview and three did not. The control variables do not reveal a possible reason for this divide. The ones who prepared went through the official website of the organisation, and read about the organisation's mission and values. The website also had a page which displayed the names, titles, pictures and short biographies of the organisation's employees. One applicant mentioned to have glimpsed through this page because they wanted to see how the organisation worked and how long each employee had worked in the organisation:

> I went there, then I met those peoples *[sic]* who are mostly in the system for more than five years. So I thought that if any person is stuck in a company for more than five years, there must be some sort of job satisfaction or some-something interesting they're doing (Applicant 1, personal communication, April 21, 2023).

Two of the applicants who did not prepare said to not having done so because they did not know what to prepare and if they should have prepared or not. They approached the P-O fit interview as an informal conversation where they would get to know their possible future team members and vice versa. The third applicant who did not prepare said the same, and explained that they wanted to go into the interview authentically as themself without any prior knowledge or assumptions about the organisation.

On the evaluators' side, the preparation for the P-O fit interviews was minimal. All of them mentioned that they went through the applicants' CVs and the document made to support them in the P-O fit interviews, but only one of them followed the structure given in

the document and focused on asking questions related to the organisation's mission and values. The main reason for not following the template was that most of the evaluators wanted the P-O fit interview to be more of a conversation and have a natural flow, and that the questions and topics discussed were based on either the evaluators' own curiosity points or whatever the applicant wanted to ask or talk about. One evaluator said: " … you cannot treat every person the same, right? So it's going to be a free discussion and the questions will be depending on the context you're discussing, or how the candidate feels at that current moment … " (Evaluator 3, personal communication, May 3, 2023). Some also said that they had already done so many P-O fit interviews that they had an idea of how they would go and what they wanted to ask.

Impressions

All applicants but one said to have got a good impression of the evaluators, and adjectives used to describe them included nice, extroverted, outgoing, excited, purpose-driven, supportive, relaxed, comfortable, professional, and positive. The one applicant whose impression was not as good said that he felt a sort of tension during the interview which made communication for him more difficult. He was male, 30 or under, and a non-resident, and interviewed by a female evaluator who was 31 or over and a migrant, but the control variables do not reveal a reason for this differing experience when compared to the other interviews.

When asked about their first and overall impressions of the applicants they interviewed, most of the evaluators described the applicants in terms of their personality or mood in the interview. Two of the evaluators described the age of the applicant, and one mentioned the country the applicant was from. Another evaluator felt a connection to the applicant because they had a similar background as migrants in the Netherlands. The initial impressions the evaluators had did not really change towards the end of any interview. All of the evaluators claimed to like the applicants they had interviewed, although one of the evaluators mentioned that the applicant she interviewed came across to her as "a little bit self-centered" because they "didn't give anyone else a chance to speak really." This was the

same interview about which it was mentioned earlier that the applicant had felt a tension which made communication for him difficult.

Salience of the Backgrounds of the Applicants

The backgrounds of the applicants became salient in five of the seven P-O fit interviews. However, the applicants and evaluators did not always agree and only two applicants mentioned this in contrast to four evaluators who pointed it out. One of the applicants said that it became apparent when the evaluators asked why they chose to move to the Netherlands, and they talked about Dutch work culture. The other applicant interviewed for a job based in a location outside the Netherlands, and was interviewed by a citizen of that country, so they talked about living and working there. The things the evaluators mentioned that made the backgrounds of the applicants become salient were the applicant's accent, name, and talking about the country they were from and its work culture. Although the backgrounds of the applicants became more often salient in the eyes of the evaluators than the applicants, all evaluators denied this having any consequences regarding the hiring decision.

Associations

In terms of associations, only one evaluator directly mentioned the cultural background of the applicant, and how that might have affected the applicant's accent which was difficult to understand for the evaluator. Another evaluator assumed that the country that another applicant was from was perhaps poorer because the applicant had told the evaluator how they did not grow up with much wealth and had to work hard to get to their current position. Otherwise, the associations mentioned by the evaluators did not relate to the backgrounds of the applicants. Again, the evaluators focused mostly on personality traits and how those might affect the job or team. One applicant had mentioned to an evaluator that they had symptoms of ADHD, which had made the evaluator slightly worried about the applicant's ability to focus on tasks. According to the evaluator, being too energetic and unable to focus would have a negative impact on succeeding in the job.

As mentioned in a previous section, the applicants were asked if they got the impression that the evaluators of the fit interview were looking for a specific type of person. In addition, they were asked if this profile had any connection to their background. Two applicants claimed not to know, while the rest said that there was a connection, but went on to focus more on their personality traits rather than their cultural backgrounds or upbringing.

When it comes to biases, none were explicitly mentioned. The questions about impressions and associations only revealed a couple of possible biases: one related to the similar background of the applicant and the evaluator, one about the accent of people from a certain country, and one about the ability to focus and succeed when one has ADHD symptoms. The biases were triggered in discussion and while paying attention to the behaviour of the applicants during the P-O fit interviews. The evaluators who made the first two points denied that these associations have any consequences regarding the hiring decision. However, the evaluator who made the last point said that they had raised this as a possible "red flag" to the hiring manager.

Impact of P-O Fit on the Hiring Chances of Applicants with a Migration Background

All applicants except for one non-resident felt that they had a good mutual understanding with the evaluators. Likewise, all but two applicants felt that the evaluators liked them in the P-O fit interviews. The two applicants left said not to know but were hopeful. One of these applicants was a migrant, and one was the non-resident who also did not feel that they reached a good mutual understanding with the evaluators. Most of the applicants were not sure whether having a good or lack of mutual understanding during the P-O fit interview had any consequences regarding the hiring decision, mainly because they believed that previous interview stages, especially the assignment, had at least an equal weight in the decision-making process. Only two of the applicants believed that a good mutual understanding or lack thereof had consequences, saying that it is important to be able to communicate well with your colleagues and understand them. These applicants were non-residents.

All of the applicants thought or at least hoped that the P-O fit interview increased their chances of being hired, and all the evaluators agreed. Respondents on both sides mentioned that their hiring chances did not only depend on the P-O fit interview, but also on earlier interview stages, and that the final decision would be made by the hiring managers, not the P-O fit evaluators. One of the applicants who was a non-resident, however, mentioned that their opinion of the organisation was degraded by the P-O fit interview. The reason for this was that, according to the applicant, the evaluators did not contribute enough to the conversation and did not feel welcoming or interested in getting to know them. The applicant's experience of previous interview stages was the opposite, so this made them question whether they would want to join the organisation or not.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to answer the question: "Does hiring for person-organisation (P-O) fit at organisation X produce discrimination in hiring against job applicants with a migration background, and if so, how?" Based on the findings, there are not many indicators that it does, but the sample is too small to make definitive conclusions. There was one evaluator who mentioned that an applicant's accent was difficult to understand, but nonetheless they said that this had no impact on the hiring decision and gave them a good review. All other evaluators did not describe the applicants' cultural characteristics when asked about their impressions and associations. However, the evaluators had varying opinions about the ideal personality traits and soft skills, and about those of the applicants. Therefore, there is reason to believe that hiring for P-O fit might in fact work against applicants with character traits that oppose or do not align with those of the evaluators or the rest of the existing workforce. Nevertheless, the possible discriminating impact of the P-O fit interview is limited by the fact that the final hiring decision hardly depends on it. According to most of the evaluators, the P-O fit interview is more of a meeting to get to know each other rather than a structured interview, and the actual hiring decision is done by the hiring manager and not the evaluators. In addition, although the perceived P-O

fit of applicants is valued by the organisation, earlier interview stages that focus on the work experience and hard skills of the applicants seem to have a greater impact on the final decision.

Discussion

One of the goals of organisation X's hiring process is ensuring that they hire the right person for each position, and they have established the P-O fit interview as an opportunity for the hiring team to assess if an applicant is aligned with the organisation's values and if they match the department and team. However, P-O fit has only weak and ungeneralisable correlations with overall job performance (Arthur et al., 2006), so it cannot be used as a criterion to predict post-hire work performance. P-O fit can predict future employee wellbeing such as satisfaction, but is shaky as a method to hire high-performing employees (Arthur et al., 2006). In the United States, for example, work attitudes such as job satisfaction or organisational commitment are not recognised as proper criteria for test validation in employment decision-making (Arthur et al., 2006), which poses legal risks for the organisation abroad should they continue to evaluate employees on these metrics post-hire.

The P-O fit interview also poses several risks for bias to take place. With the interview, organisation X focuses on finding applicants who have similar characteristics with existing employees of the organisation, which means that the organisation evaluates applicants based on supplementary P-O fit (Horverak et al., 2013). This poses the first risk for bias, since evaluators are attracted to applicants similar to them and therefore might assess similar applicants as more qualified for the job and a better match for the organisation than dissimilar applicants (Byrne, 1972). The second risk is that a lot of the interview questions and desired traits for a new team member are left for individual evaluators to decide. Hiring procedures that depend on the arbitrary discretion of the evaluators can lead to disparate impact discrimination (Pager & Shepherd, 2008). Thirdly, the short time of the P-O fit interview, which was also mentioned by several evaluators, poses the risk for stereotypes have a stronger impact (MacRae et al., 1998). Finally,

interviewing applicants about their similarity to the organisation's values poses a risk for "impression management", which means that applicants might deliberately present themselves to produce impressions that are not sustained after hire (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 2013; Higgins & Judge, 2004).

In terms of soft skills, the organisation evaluates the applicants' adaptability/flexibility, resilience/stress tolerance, self-starter behaviour, ambition, and time management. Whether this is work-related or not is contested, and depends on the skill and position (Zamudio & Lichter, 2008). What is certain though, is that using the same skills to evaluate all applicants favours individuals from one group over another, which might lead to disparate impact discrimination. All soft skills cannot be required for all positions, just like not every hard skill is useful in every position. For a salesperson it might be beneficial to be ambitious, but for an accountant such a quality does not matter.

Limitations

Despite an ambitious sampling strategy, the final sample was left incomplete from the ideal, and lacked especially non-migrant and non-resident informants. This makes the research less externally valid and skews the results towards the perspectives of migrant respondents. In addition, the organisation where the research was conducted was highly diverse and international, and used English as the company language, which might have made attitudes towards applicants with a migrant background more positive compared to an average Dutch company. It is also important to note, that the applicants and evaluators might have not been fully transparent in their responses due to the delicacy of the subject and my positionality as an employee of the organisation. However, I believe that the findings provide enough data to give an indication about the impact of hiring for P-O fit at organisation X.

Recommendations

For the organisation, I recommend that the P-O fit component is developed further to mitigate the risk of bias. Evaluating the applicant's values and team fit is highly subjective and non-work related, but criteria for soft skills may be reasonable depending on the

position. Therefore, I suggest that the P-O fit interview should only cover soft skills that could be useful for the position the applicant has applied for. This means that for each position, a different set of soft skills should be indicated based on the job description. This cannot be left to the discretion of individual evaluators, but standardised, so that the risk of bias is mitigated. The content of the interviews should also be structured and standardised, so that each applicant would be treated the same way, receive the same questions, and evaluated on the same metrics. Additionally, a bias mitigation training for evaluators and selectors could be put in place.

Further research should focus more on the evaluation of personality traits and soft skills in hiring, since this was not the initial focus of the thesis. The research should also be replicated in another company or country to see if the experiences of applicants differ based on the demographics of the evaluators, and the opinions of hiring managers and what they do with the information provided by evaluators should be taken into account because they make the final hiring decisions. It is also advised to study a larger and more diverse sample to be able to make stronger conclusions.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide for Applicants

- Ask for permission to record

- Introduce yourself and the research

- Remind of your position, their anonymity and right to withdraw etc.

- Ask for informed consent

Background Information

Age:

Gender:

Migrant, non-migrant or non-resident:

Reconstruction of the Event

- Did you prepare anything for the interview? Why or why not?

- When the interview started, who did you see?

- Who was the first to speak, and what did they say?

- What kind of questions were you asked, and in what order?

- How did the interview end? Who said the last words, and what were they?

Evaluation of the Situation

- How did you feel right after the interview? Why?

- Did you feel comfortable and like you could be yourself in the interview? Why or why not?

- What kind of impression did you get of the interviewers? Why?

- Did you like the interviewers? Why or not?

- Do you think the interviewers liked you? Why or why not?

- Do you feel like there was a good mutual understanding between you and the interviewers?

- Do you expect that this mutual understanding (or lack thereof) will have consequences for your hiring?

- Why do you think you were asked the questions you were asked?

- Do you think the questions were related to the job you are/were applying for?

- Do you think this interview increased or decreased your chances of being hired? Why?

- Was there ever a moment during the interview when you became aware of your own background?
    - If yes, what triggered this?
    - If yes, what do you think were the consequences of it?

Person-Organisation Fit at the Organisation

- Based on this interview, what kind of profile do you think the interviewers were looking for?

- Do you think this profile has a connection to your background?

Appendix B: Interview Guide for Evaluators

- Ask for permission to record

- Introduce yourself and the research

- Remind of your position, their anonymity, right to withdraw etc.

- Ask for informed consent

Background Information

Age:

Gender:

Migrant, non-migrant or non-resident:

Reconstruction of the Event

- Did you prepare anything for the interview? Why or why not?

- When the interview started, who did you see?

- Who was the first to speak, and what did they say?

- Did you follow the structure of the template for culture sessions? Why or why not?

- What kind of questions did you ask, and in what order?

- How did the interview end? Who said the last words, and what were they?

Evaluation of the Situation

- How did you feel right after the interview? Why?

- Did you feel comfortable and like you could be yourself in the interview? Why or why not?

- What kind of impression did you get of the applicant? Why?

- Did you like the applicant? Why or why not?

- Do you feel like you "clicked" with the person?

- Would you expect to have a good time with this person?

- Does this "click" (or lack thereof) have consequences for the hiring?

- What kind of associations come to your mind when you think of this applicant? Why?

- Do you think these associations are related to the background of the applicant?

- Do you think these associations are relevant to the job?

- Why did you choose to ask the questions you asked?

- Do you think the questions you asked were related to the job the applicant applied for?

- Does this interview increase or decrease the applicant's chances of being hired? Why?

- Was there ever a moment during the interview when you became aware of the background of the applicant?
    - If yes, what triggered this?
    - If yes, what were the consequences of it?

Person-Organisation Fit at the Organisation

- How would you describe the organisational culture of organisation X?

- What makes an applicant a great cultural fit at organisation X?

Appendix C: Coding Scheme

Theme	Code	Description
Reconstruction of the event	Preparation	Did the applicant or evaluator prepare anything for the P-O fit interview, and why.
	First impressions	The applicant's first impression of the evaluator and vice versa.
	First speaker	The first to speak in the interview.
	Template	Was the template created by the organisation for the P-O fit interviews followed?
	Questions and topics of discussion	What kind of questions and topics were discussed during the interview.
	End of interview	How the interview ended.
Evaluation of the situation	Feelings right after the interview	How did the applicant or evaluator feel right after the interview ended.
	Feeling of being able to be oneself	Did the applicant or evaluator feel comfortable to express themself in the interview.
	Overall impression	The applicant's overall impression of the evaluator and vice versa, after the interview.
	Liking the counterpart	Did the applicant like the evaluator or vice versa.
	Click	Did the evaluator experience a "click" or chemistry with the applicant, and did this have any consequences for the hiring decision.
	Associations	What kind of associations came to the evaluator's mind when they thought of the applicant, were they related to the applicant's background, and did they have any consequences.
	Feeling of being liked	Did the applicant think the evaluator liked them or not.
	Mutual understanding	Did the applicant think there was a good mutual understanding between them during the interview, and did they think this had any consequences for the hiring decision.
	Reason for questions	Why both of the parties think the questions asked during the interview were chosen.
	Work-relatedness of questions	Do the parties think the questions asked during the interview were related to the applied job/internship or not.

	Increased or decreased chances	Did the interview increase or decrease the applicant's chances of being hired.
	Background becoming salient	Did the background of the applicant become salient during the interview, what triggered it, and what were the consequences.
P-O fit at the organisation	Organisational culture	How did the evaluators describe the culture of organisation X.
	Thoughts about P-O fit	What the parties think makes an applicant a P-O fit at organisation X.
	Connection of P-O fit to background	Does the applicant think their idea of a P-O fit at the organisation has any connection to their own background.

Only asked from and expressed by applicants.
Only asked from and expressed by evaluators.